



# Information for Social Change

ISSN 1364-694X



## Information for Social Change Number 31

Summer 2011

**Issue Editor:  
Martyn Lowe**



**Information for Social Change** is an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers. It is committed to promoting alternatives to the dominant paradigms of library and information work and publishes its own journal, *Information for Social Change* (freely available online at <http://www.libr.org/isc>). Information for Social Change is an Organisation in Liaison with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).

**<http://www.libr.org/isc>**

**Information for Social Change Number 31**

**Summer 2011**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Editorial (Martyn Lowe)	2
A Type of Book Review (Martyn Lowe)	3
Community Led Commissioning (John Pateman)	7
Current UK Campaigns Against Nukiller Power (Martyn Lowe)	11
Simple pleasures (Jeff Cloves)	16
Neutrality in Context: Principles and Rights (Julie Biando Edwards)	17
Looking at the works of Paolo Uccello (Martyn Lowe)	28
Public Libraries & Social Justice (John Pateman)	30
Public Libraries & The Spirit Level (John Pateman)	40

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**By Way of a short introduction to this issue**

**Martyn Lowe**

This issue of ISC is very much of a mixed-bag of articles.

There are articles which cover both library issues,  
and none library centred information work.

What all of these pieces have in common is that they  
pose questions, or raise new ideas.

I hope that you find these articles of interest & use.

Martyn Lowe  
August 2011

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**A Type of Book Review**

**Book review: Just My Type by Simon Garfield**

**Martyn Lowe**

Just My Type.

A book about fonts.

Profile books – London 2010

ISBN 978 1846683015

eISBN 978 1847652928

There is something really wonderful about type fonts and type designs.

The very design & use of type fonts combines both a very disciplined use of technical skills, and great artistic flair.

Type fonts define how we look at the world, be it in just how we perceive the look of our cities, or gives a definition to all of the information which is presented to us by the hour.

A type face can both inform us about what we are reading about, place a piece of text within an historical context, and tell give us clues to a geographical location.

Simon Garfield in his work traces both the history of type fonts from there early use by printers such as William Caxton, Gutenberg, and William De Worde, via that of the monotype corporation and Eric Gill, to the various type faces which we use upon our computers.

In between we learn about how such type faces as Gill Sans, Bodoni, Baskerville, and Goudy came to be both designed and have styled what we read upon the printed page.

The book then goes on to illustrate just how a few fonts such as univers, arial, and helvetica have come to dominate the signage which we see all around our world.

Yet what the author does is far more instructive and fascinating than any other book of typography that I've ever read in the past, for he tells something about the background history of those who designed the various type fonts.

The book is predominantly set in a Sabon MT font, but also uses the fonts which are being covered within the text.

Thus the first paragraph of any chapter which focuses upon a specific font is also typeset in that font.

This is a device which makes it very easy to follow just which fonts the author is writing about.

A lot of the book is a technical examination of just how type fonts are or have been designed, and the just how you can tell one font from another.

Yet this is not a dry technical book, as the author conveys these facts in the form of some very amusing stories.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is entitled ' Pirates and clones', in which the author looks at the various font clones which are in existence.

e.g.

How Arial is derived from Helvetica.

The author also covers all of the issues which surround the intellectual property laws that appertain to type fonts.

The intellectual property rights issues which relate to type font design are very complex indeed, as they cover a wide range of copyright and patent law issues, and it can cost a lot of money to register them all.

Just look at any type font and ask yourself who owns the design, or how typefaces vary one from the other, and you will appreciate just how much technical knowledge surround these kind of issues.

This in turn makes for some very bad humour at the expense of the law.

Just by way of illustration: -

Even the French government agency which promotes internet copyright broke French copyright law when it used a typeface called Bienvenue upon some of its publications.

Bienvenue is an exclusive custom designed font which is owned by French Telcom.

Another rather amusing Chapter of the book is entitled:

' the worst fonts in the world', in which the author lists those fonts which just don't work, and why.

Coming top of this list is the London 2012 Olympic typeface, which is called 2012 Headline.

Those of you who are already familiar with the logo for the London 2012 Olympic event will really appreciate the way he describes just how bad this font really is:

-

' ..... by the time that it was released people were so tired of being outraged by the logo that the type passed by unnoticed. '

What else can I add to that wonderful observation ?

This is a book which should be read by anyone:

be you book designer, someone who puts up a public notice from time to time, or just reads direction signs upon public transport.

We can all learn something important from this work.

Typography and Type fonts are what defines the modern world, and Simon Garfield has managed to write a book which describes just how it has been made that way.

Martyn Lowe

## **Information for Social Change Number 31**

**Summer 2011**

### **Community Led Commissioning**

**John Pateman**

The comprehensive spending review is striking real fear in the hearts of those who provide public libraries and those who rely on them. But we should all be afraid of the ramifications of cutting public services. Evidence points to the fact that the most successful societies are those with the strongest public services, which in turn creates a resilient population.

If the "Big Society" can give power to communities and individuals, while also saving costs, then the concept must be lauded. However, it has faced criticism for being a thin veil for draconian spending cuts and an excuse for the state to retreat, leaving communities in the lurch. If public libraries are simply dumped onto local communities then this will not work

It does not have to be like that. One important aspect of the Big Society is the chance to create new relationships between public libraries and their users. For the idea to be effective, perceptions of public libraries need to be radically changed. Critical to success is the quality of how services are commissioned.

Commissioning is perhaps one of the most misunderstood pieces of jargon in the public services' field. Favored by professionals, the term means nothing to the people it is meant to serve. It is often used as a synonym for procurement within public services, which has created a tendency to confuse the funding and allocation of public services with their provision. A standard definition would help.



Public sector agencies are labyrinthine, and the needs and choices of most users of public services do not fit neatly into services' institutional boundaries.

Commissioning must have the needs and choices of service users at its heart in order to provide the most appropriate services. This means having the sustained and genuine involvement of service users, which in many cases should be based on individuals and communities commissioning their own services directly from providers. Where this is not possible, the public sector needs to ensure that its services are focused entirely on users' real needs.

Many public libraries are starting to ask service users for their input, but many in the most deprived communities report that they never find out the results. This is exploitative. People are expected to contribute without ever seeing a positive change in their services.

It doesn't matter who provides services, but public, private and civil society organisations must stand on an equal footing when competing to deliver them. They should be judged according to their ability to achieve user-focused outcomes, not on which sector they are from. And in some circumstances, people should be able to commission services from themselves, and receive payment. By tying community engagement and development directly to service provision, there is the potential to build the networks that create a feeling of belonging in a place.

Community led commissioning is not a threat to the respect given to public libraries or those working in them. What is threatening public libraries is uncertainty over future funding and sustainability.

Nevertheless, the virtues of community led commissioning will not excuse poor performers. Processes must be in place for any provider to lose a contract if they are unable to achieve community determined impacts and outcomes.

There should be greater co-operation between public sector organisations to ensure services are focused on service users, rather than being limited to institutional boundaries and cultures. This would bring great potential benefits.

Individuals and communities would be able to see the direct effects of commissioning.

But the full benefits of community led commissioning will only be realised by taking a long-term view: there is too much at stake to only be motivated by short-term cost-saving. Authorities need to recognise the positive assets within communities and act to ensure they can be expressed to the best advantage.

### Co-Production

Co-Production is a model for getting local communities actively involved in the design, planning, delivery and evaluation of public libraries. The main features of Co-production are as follows:

- . Co-production emphasises that people are not passive recipients of services and have assets and expertise which can help improve services.
- . Co-production is a potentially transformative way of thinking about power, resources, partnerships, risks and outcomes, not an off-the-shelf model of service provision or a single magic solution.
- . To act as partners, both users and providers must be empowered. Co-production means involving citizens in collaborative relationships with more empowered frontline staff who are able and confident to share power and accept user expertise.
- . Staff should be trained in the benefits of co-production, supported in positive risk-taking and encouraged to identify new opportunities for collaboration with people who use services.
- . People should be encouraged to access co-productive initiatives, recognising and supporting diversity among the people who use services.

- . The creation of new structures, regulatory and commissioning practices and financial streams is necessary to embed co-production as a long-term rather than ad hoc solution.
- . Learning from existing international case studies of co-production while recognising the contribution of initiatives reflecting local needs is important

Community Led Commissioning and Co-Production are some of the essential building blocks for developing Needs Based Library Services.

John Pateman

*Please also see the ISC statement: Cuts to UK Infrastructure under the UK Government elected in 2010*

[http://libr.org/isc/occasional\\_papers/Cuts%20to%20UK%20Infrastructure%20under%20the%20UK%20Government%20elected%20in%202010.pdf](http://libr.org/isc/occasional_papers/Cuts%20to%20UK%20Infrastructure%20under%20the%20UK%20Government%20elected%20in%202010.pdf)

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**Current UK Campaigns Against Nuclear Power.**

**Martyn Lowe**

With the mounting concerns being expressed about the dangers of nuclear power there is still a need to stop the building of new atomic reactors.

Within Britain EDF ( Electricity de France ) is trying to steam roller the building of two new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point in Somerset and Sizewell in Suffolk.

In the last year there has emerged a network of organisations in the UK which are campaigning to stop this new atomic threat.

Here are a selection of the most important of these campaigning bodies, & how they describe their campaigning work.

- - -

The Stop Nuclear Power Network.

<http://stopnuclearpoweruk.net/>

The Stop Nuclear Power Network is a UK-based non-hierarchical grassroots network of groups and individuals taking action against nuclear power and its expansion and supporting sustainable alternatives.

- - -

Kick Nuclear.

<http://stopnuclearpoweruk.net.tomato.netuxo.co.uk/groups/kicknuclear>

'Kick Nuclear is a London based grass-roots group campaigning against the UK's addiction to nuclear power. It is affiliated to the Stop Nuclear Power Network.'

- - -

Stop New Nuclear.

<http://stopnewnuclear.org.uk/>

Aims to:

'Stop the next generation of nuclear power stations with a blockade at Hinkley Point.

Join us at Hinkley on 3 October 2011.'

- - -

Nuclear Trains Action Group

<http://www.nonucleartrains.org.uk/>

'The Nuclear Trains Action Group (NTAG): a campaigning organization opposing the transport of nuclear waste through densely populated areas such as London.'

- - -

101 Uses for a Nuclear Power Station

<http://101-uses-for-a-nuclear-power-station.blogspot.com/>

This is a website which covers nukiller power issues within Cumbria.

i.e. The area around the Sellafield (formerly known as Windscale) Nukiller waste plant.

- - -

Boycott EDF

<http://boycottedf.org.uk/>

'Calling for a boycott of EDF Energy and all its subsidiaries.

With the boycott we demand:

- A stop of all plans for a new build of nuclear power in Britain by EDF (but we don't like nuclear power stations by RWE or E.on either)
- A shut down of all EDF owned or controlled nuclear power stations in Britain.
- No replacement of nuclear with coal or oil fired power stations
- Implementation of a strategy do decarbonize EDF by 2030 (Zero Carbon EDF 2030). '

- - -

Stop Hinkley

<http://stophinkley.org/>

Stop Hinkley, the local campaign against Hinkley Point and Oldbury nuclear power stations

- - -

CORE

<http://www.corecumbria.co.uk/>

Cumbrians Opposed To a Radioactive Environment.

- - -

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

<http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/>

'Nuclear Free Local Authorities tackle in practical ways, and within their powers, the problems posed by civil and military nuclear hazards. As the local government voice on nuclear issues, the NFLA are keen to encourage local authorities to adopt anti-nuclear policies and join our network.'

- - -

Environmental News and Comment.

<http://www.robedwards.com/>

' Over 1,000 articles on nuclear power, nuclear weapons, climate change, transport, GM, pollution, waste, wildlife, freedom of information and other issues from Rob Edwards, a freelance environmental journalist.'

- - -

No2nuclearpower

<http://www.no2nuclearpower.org.uk/resources/index.php>

' News and Information about the UK nuclear industry.'

- - -

Neptune Network

<http://www.neptunenetwork.org/>

'Neptune Network works to protect the sea against environmental toxins, and to get a clean sea.'

' We shall confront all of which constitutes a threat to the environment.'

The organisation is based in Oslo.

It is currently campaigning to Stop Sellafield.

---

For a fuller list of UK & Ireland national and local groups

See:

<http://www.no2nuclearpower.org.uk/resources/index.php>

Martyn Lowe



**Information for Social Change Number 31**  
**Summer 2011**

**Simple pleasures**

Public libraries are priceless  
reading is free  
bliss is a good book  
and a nice cup of tea

Jeff Cloves

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**Neutrality in Context: Principles and Rights**

**Julie Biando Edwards**

*What is a library all about? What is its social role?*

Progressive librarians have a history of turning a critical eye towards the concept of "library neutrality." Far from treating it as an untouchable tenet of librarianship, immune from debate and above consideration, these librarians have critically questioned whether neutrality actually serves our patrons and our profession well.<sup>ii</sup> As with all good debates, librarians fall on many sides of this issue. From a progressive standpoint, neutrality has certainly helped librarians build collections that include non-mainstream points of view. On the other hand, librarians are rightly concerned that the concept of neutrality has become a cloak for inaction and disengagement from our patrons, the community, and ultimately the profession. There is certainly no consensus on the value of neutrality. I would argue, ultimately, that the value of neutrality should not necessarily be the point of the debate at all. While it is worthwhile and necessary to critically consider neutrality as a useful concept in librarianship, it remains, for better or worse, a concept so deeply ingrained in our profession that no amount of debate is likely to shake it from our foundations. While we should never cease to critically examine and challenge our professional principles, I would like to spend some time thinking about how neutrality might interact with and inform librarianship if we move away from the profession's traditional focus on individual human rights and towards a more holistic focus on group and community rights.

\*\*\*\*\*

Interestingly, neither the American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics nor the ALA Bill of Rights uses the words neutral or neutrality.<sup>iii</sup> The concept is easily read into each document, however. Both the Code of Ethics and

Bill of Rights establish the role that the professional librarian will play within the library and the community, and in both cases that role is one of information provider across ideological boundaries. Providing access and service while upholding the tenets of intellectual freedom and combating censorship is thus translated into neutrality. As mentioned in the introduction, there is worth in this position. The concept of library neutrality has helped to establish the idea of the library as a place in which all ideas are welcome, all information seekers can find resources, and where librarians will privilege neither information nor patrons based on private interests, personal bias, politics, or doctrine.

The ALA Code of Ethics and Bill of Rights promote neutrality as a means of protecting the individual rights of patrons. In the ALA Bill of Rights, these rights include the right to read books on any and all subjects, regardless of the origin, background, or views of the authors; the right to read books that present different points of view on a subject; the right to access information without censorship; the right of any and all people to access information, regardless of origin, age, background, or views; and the right to use display or exhibit space equitably.<sup>iv</sup> The ALA Code of Ethics similarly establishes strong and explicit support for individual rights, and these rights have formed the basis of both American professional librarianship and the ways in which American citizens view and understand their libraries. So, to protect the right of any one person to seek information, the library takes a neutral stance on patrons – seeing them as information seekers above all else. Then, to protect the right to seek information on all subjects, the library will collect materials that provide different viewpoints, that highlight minority opinions, or that otherwise exist outside the mainstream. To protect the right to inquiry free of censorship librarians will provide materials to any and all patrons without question. To provide the right to equitable meeting and display space, the library will provide access for all.

Librarianship's focus on individual rights extends beyond these two foundational documents, however. If we look outside of librarianship and into the world of international human rights, we can find explicit language on the importance of individual rights in the context of information seeking. Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) both deal with rights that will be familiar to librarians. Article 18 reads in part "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscious, and religion," while Article 19 reads

in full “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”<sup>v</sup> Article 19 in particular, with its explicit reference to information seeking, is familiar to librarians worldwide, and was endorsed by the ALA in its “Resolution on IFLA, Human Rights, and Freedom of Expression”<sup>vi</sup> after having been formally adopted as ALA policy in 1991.<sup>vii</sup>

The ALA’s adoption of Article 19 was a huge step in the right direction for the profession. Endorsing Article 19 as good professional policy sends a strong signal that individual patron rights are not just an issue of professional ethics, but an issue of human rights on the most broad scale. Although the ALA could – and, I believe, should – be more vocal in its support of human rights, the adoption of Article 19 created a direct connection between the ALA documents and the UDHR. The spirit of Article 19 of the UDHR is fleshed out in the ALA Code of Ethics and Bill of Rights, and neutrality became the means by which professional librarians could attempt to ensure that all patrons were able to “seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Neutrality in the name of individual rights, then, though never articulated in precisely this way, has shaped the ways in which professional librarians perceive our duties and responsibilities. And we have been successful enough that Americans generally understand and accept that this stance of studied neutrality is essential for the individual freedom of all. Library neutrality, in this context, can thus be read not as an abdication of a position, but the adoption of the position that individual rights require a space in which the individual can, in fact, exercise these rights.

\*\*\*\*\*

But what if we look beyond individual rights to group rights? Does neutrality begin to serve our profession less well if we are doing more than protecting the right of the individual to seek information? I have written in the past about the importance of looking at the universe of rights outlined in the UDHR.<sup>viii</sup> Of

particular importance to the future of libraries, I believe, is Article 27, which states in part that “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”<sup>ix</sup> This Article, though not dealing specifically with rights immediately recognizable as applicable to libraries, nonetheless is essential for librarians to understand and to make sense of in the context of our profession. Article 27 highlights the importance of not only individual rights, but of group rights, and librarians should be as interested in group rights as we are in individual rights. Specifically, libraries should be instrumental in helping our communities understand and negotiate what it means to “freely participate in the cultural life of the community.”<sup>x</sup>

But how does neutrality work in the context of group rights? If the context shifts away from individual rights, are we getting too close to that “hottest place in hell” that Joseph Good writes of?<sup>xi</sup> Certainly, questions of individual rights, group rights, community, cultural life, and neutrality are deeply entangled. Were there clear distinctions amongst these terms, we would not have to consider how context changes the idea and practice of neutrality. And where neutrality might be understood as fairly clear-cut in terms of the rights of the individual (though, as we know, it is not clear-cut there at all), it is nearly impossible to reach a satisfactory conclusion regarding the role that neutrality plays in group rights, mainly because group rights are by nature complicated and complex and because they bump up against individual rights all of the time.

It is perhaps best, then, to turn to an example. One of the hottest flashpoints for conflicts between professional neutrality and group rights centers around how groups use the library space, and what that means for the library, the group itself, the community, and the individual. As I stated above, the ALA Code of Ethics is fairly clear about library space and neutrality: to provide the right to equitable meeting and display space, the library will provide access for all. But what does this actually look like in real libraries? Turning away from theory and into the real world of librarianship can help us better grapple with how neutrality and group rights can intersect and how we might understand the role of librarians when considering whether or not neutrality is a useful and valid stance to take when confronted with trying to promote and protect group rights.

A white separatist group recently chose a public library in western Montana as the venue for a series of Holocaust denial films. The public outcry, protests, and eventual debate, while contentious and uncomfortable, were at least carried out in the light of day, so to speak. The public nature of the screenings created an opportunity for the citizens of the county to speak openly about the kinds of values the community should embrace. What if the films had been shown in a private home, and not in a public place? Would these opportunities for debate and dialogue have been so radically open? Would the viewers of these films have had their assumptions challenged as effectively by the multicultural values of their neighbors, or by more accurate interpretations of history? Would the community at large have been as engaged in the dialectic about its identity had the white separatists *not* shown the film in the library?

The answer to each of these questions is, quite obviously, no. In this case, the principle of library neutrality meant that the group of separatists had as much right to access the library as any other group, or individual. However odious the beliefs of this particular group, they were not denied access to space that has come to be defined by its very neutrality. And, in this case, the hosting of these films in a public venue allowed the library to serve as a catalyst for community dialogue, debate, and dissent – common goods that we as librarians should hold essential for civic discourse and engagement in our communities.

But as with all conflicts surrounding library neutrality and rights, the issue is not so simple. If the white separatist group in this case had wanted to create a display of hate propaganda, should they have been allowed to? If this, or a similar group, had wanted to reserve the library meeting space for a rally or revival, would that have been permitted? These are complicated questions, not only because they get at the heart of what is permissible under library neutrality, but also because they force the issue that is at the center of the debate over neutrality – whose rights get preference? And what happens when the rights of a group infringe on the rights of an individual – if, for example, the use of the library by white separatists had resulted in patrons of color or Jewish patrons feeling unwelcome, or even feeling threatened, in the library space?

Libraries often deal with these issues as they arise, primarily by developing building use policy. Libraries can and do place limits on what they will allow in terms of display space and meeting space. Neutrality does not mean that all is permissible – that would be professional folly, bringing us back to that “hottest place in hell” and undermining our education and training. But it does mean, in the case of individual rights and often in the case of group rights, that the library can house some materials and groups that are offensive to others, or to the community at large. Thus, libraries determine what is permissible in their institutions and how that will be negotiated in terms of our history of neutrality.

Library policy, though, looks at issues and conflicts on an individual and case-by-case basis. It doesn't speak at all to overarching principles of librarianship, and it speaks even less to the roles of librarians. The issue becomes one of context and degree. In the case of the white separatists in western Montana, the fact that the library did indeed allow the use of its space for a controversial purpose meant that the community was able to engage with this group and with itself as it figured out what its own values and identity were. The library, as I mentioned, was the catalyst. And perhaps this is the best that we can do as we ponder our history, our ethics, and our role in considering not only individual but group rights. It may well be that it is good enough for the library to exist as a space and a place in which all aspects of the community can meet and share and debate and learn from each other. There is real value to this. As I have argued elsewhere, the library may be the one social institution where disparate members of the community can find out about themselves and each other, where different groups can negotiate what it means to share a specific place.<sup>xii</sup> It may well be that library policy dealing with issues of space, use, group rights, and neutrality is the best we can do. But what if it isn't?

I would like to propose that the library be more than a catalyst. While there is value and a certain nobility in serving as a catalyst, and while doing so allows the library to retain its sense of neutrality and encourages citizens to understand that the library is a space for all, there might be a more fruitful middle ground to consider. If we are to understand librarianship and library services in terms of human rights, which I think we should, we must figure out ways to balance human rights with our professional commitment to neutrality.

Serving as a catalyst may be the safest way to go, but that means that the library, by definition, lets any potential discourse and debate surrounding group rights and library use *happen to it*. I don't advocate abandoning professional neutrality in favor of human rights, precisely because the neutrality vs. human rights debate is a false dichotomy in certain cases pertaining to librarianship. As I've outlined above, neutrality can be an excellent professional tool by which we can protect certain human rights. But we must recognize neutrality as just that – a *tool*, a means to an end, not an end in itself. Neutrality should be employed where it helps secure and protect human rights. But it doesn't trump human rights and it should never be used as an excuse for inaction, especially where lack of action means that rights are not secured or protected, or that they are violated. In this case neutrality is indeed an evil.

Perhaps libraries can steer a middle course between our deeply ingrained commitment to neutrality and the more political and perhaps radical actions of taking a stance on a position. For example – a library could, as the library in western Montana did, have a broad and liberal meeting use policy that allows space for groups that might be deemed offensive to the community at large. But instead of letting the policy and the principle of neutrality serve as cover and shield for the library, I would suggest that the library more actively help the community as a whole engage in dialogue, discourse, and debate. This could involve organizing and hosting moderated debates and discussions, setting up book displays or other displays that provide a counter-message, or organizing film festivals or other artistic events. These are all steps that could be taken in the event that library use by a specific group causes tension in the community. Under this model, the library maintains the principles of use for all while at the same time actually participating in and engaging with the community as a whole in negotiating what group rights mean for the library, for the community, and for individuals. As Robert Jensen has noted,

Libraries remain one of the few common spaces in the society where people come to engage ideas, and hence they are crucial sites where people looking for such engagement can find it, and where others can be encouraged to engage. Part of that can be accomplished by simply making space available. But librarians also can create opportunities for dialogue. Can that be done neutrally?xiii



Jensen goes on to highlight what I maintain is the real issue, that “the question isn’t whether one is neutral but whether one is truly independent from control and allowed to pursue free and open inquiry.”<sup>xiv</sup> If people expect engagement at the library, why not have the library and its librarians be at the center of framing and facilitating the debate, rather than merely by providing the space in which the debate can occur. While the library then is a catalyst for the debate, it doesn’t remain unchanged or uninvolved with the actual reaction, so to speak. The library can have a role in directing conversations and negotiating understanding, if not acceptance. And if, unlike a true catalyst, the library itself *is* changed in the process, this is not a bad thing, provided that the change is the outcome of honest and robust debate and makes the library and the community stronger in the ability to understand and uphold human rights.

Engagement could also, and should also, involve networking and acting outside of the library – becoming involved in the community in rich ways, not only as librarians but as citizens ourselves. This can take the form of individual or group activism, writing, organizing, etc. We should also make a habit of reaching out to all groups in the community and establishing relationships before potential conflicts arise, so that when they do arise we are better able to negotiate complex and controversial issues. Doing so allows us to educate users about what a library is and does but also helps us understand the needs of community groups. Further, we are then able to call upon the groups most affected when a conflict occurs. In the case of white supremacists at the library, prior relationships with minority or Jewish groups in particular could deeply inform the ways in which the library can best act in countering that particular type of hate speech and ensuring that all community members feel safe in the library.<sup>xv</sup>

And if there were a point where the rights of a group violate other human rights in substantial ways? In that case, the library should take a stand and refuse space, but should explain why, preferably in terms of human rights. As Ann Sparanese has noted “over time librarians have been willing to engage in activism surrounding our values, not merely to propagate a neutral stand in the face of threats.”<sup>xvi</sup> She goes on to define library activism as having more “to do with the social responsibilities of libraries, not a purist version of intellectual

freedom. . .the librarian's devotion to democracy and democratic values often requires an activism that goes beyond lip service to abstract principles and involves. . .how such principles play out in society."xvii If we make human rights part of our values, then we create a space in which activism around protecting these rights can be foundational to the work we do.

These are complicated and complex issues, and there is no easy solution for how to negotiate group rights and neutrality. As I stated earlier, dismissing the idea of neutrality altogether negates the benefits of this position in certain contexts while also ignoring the deeply entrenched roots that neutrality has in the profession. At the same time, we can't use neutrality as an excuse for disengagement, or as a pedestal on which we stand while conflict and debate swirl around us. Rather, I think it is useful to examine neutrality in context, and to understand and accept that it is best understood as a means by which more robust debate can occur, rather than an end in itself. If we are going to argue that human rights should be foundational to librarianship and library services, then we must be ready to take action, inside and outside of the library, when necessary. We must also be willing to consider what our ultimate values are. Mark Alfino and Linda Pierce touch on the complexity of neutrality beautifully, and I will quote at length from their work *Information Ethics for Librarianship* here:

Libraries are integral parts of the communities in which they serve, and those communities and constituents are daily faced with an enormous number of social and political issues affecting not only individuals and the community but also the library. The concept of professional neutrality in the face of these issues becomes more difficult to defend if we accept two premises: (1) information is not neutral and (2) libraries have traditionally responded to the lead and norms of the mainstream, relatively conservative American culture. . .If information is not neutral, if moral judgments are a part of information usage, and if one of our jobs as a profession is to recognize those judgments and make decisions, it would seem that certain principles of truth, justice, equality, and freedom must be defining values for the profession. If we are unable or unwilling to state those values in a public forum, then how can we expect our patrons to honor and respect those values?xviii

This doesn't mean abandoning the professional principle of neutrality, but it does suggest looking at those principles in context. It means not holding those principles so sacred that they trump moral action. More importantly, neither does it mean using those principles as an excuse for inaction, or as a cloak against messy involvement in community debate. Instead, I think we should look at neutrality in context, move beyond policies and principles, and become active in the debates that our libraries, as so called neutral places, encourage and foster. Librarians must be at the forefront of helping the community negotiate its identity, and deepening its understanding of human rights, by becoming involved in the debate, not simply by providing the space for the discourse.

- i Durrani, S. and Smallwood, E. (2008). "The Professional is Political: Redefining the Social Role of Public Libraries," in A. Lewis (Ed.), *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* (119-140). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- ii For a condensed look at this debate, see Lewis, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- iii American Library Association. "ALA Code of Ethics", <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>. Accessed August 8, 2011 and "ALA Bill of Rights", <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/index.cfm>. Accessed August 8, 2011.
- iv American Library Association. "ALA Bill of Rights", <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/index.cfm> Accessed April 5, 2011.
- v United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>. Accessed August 8, 2011.
- vi American Library Association. "ALA Resolution on IFLA, Human Rights, and Freedom of Expression." <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/iro/awardsactivities/resolutionifla.cfm>. Accessed August 8, 2011.

- vii American Library Association. "ALA Policy Manual: Section 58, International Relations", [http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section2/ALA\\_print\\_layout\\_1\\_603036\\_603036.cfm#58.4](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section2/ALA_print_layout_1_603036_603036.cfm#58.4). Accessed August 8, 2011.
- viii See Julie Biando Edwards and Stephan P. Edwards, "Libraries, Cultural Life, and Community Identity," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Libraries from a Human Rights Perspective, 31 March – 2 April, 2008*, ed. Nabil Alawi (Ramallah, Palestine: Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, 2008): 72-83 and Edwards, J.B. and Edwards, S.P. (Eds.) (2010) *Beyond Article 19: Libraries and Social and Cultural Rights*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- ix United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>. Accessed August 11, 2011.
- x See Edwards, J.B. (2010) "Symbolic Possibilities," in Edwards, J.B. and Edwards, S.P. (Eds.) (2010) *Beyond Article 19: Libraries and Social and Cultural Rights* (7-40). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- xi Good, J. (2008). "The Hottest Place in Hell: The Crisis of Neutrality in Contemporary Librarianship," in A. Lewis (Ed.), *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* (141-143). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- xii See Edwards, J.B. (2010) "Symbolic Possibilities," in Edwards, J.B. and Edwards, S.P. (Eds.) (2010) *Beyond Article 19: Libraries and Social and Cultural Rights* (7-40). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- xiii Jensen, R. (2008). "The Myth of the Neutral Professional," in A. Lewis (Ed.), *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* 89-96). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- xiv Ibid. 95.
- xv Thanks to my friend and colleague Tobin Miller Shearer for influencing my thinking on this issue.
- xvi Sparanese, A. (2008). "Activist Librarianship: Heritage or Heresy?," in A. Lewis (Ed.), *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* (67-81). Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- xvii Ibid. 75
- xviii Alfino, M. and Pierce, L. (1997). *Information Ethics for Librarianship*. Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland & Co.: 123.

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**Looking at the works of Paolo Uccello.**

**Martyn Lowe**

Sometimes one can look at works of art, and make some interesting observations upon just what one is seeing.

These observations may have nothing to do with the history of art, or the artist, but do relate to a kind of visual knowledge which we all share.

I wish to illustrate this point by citing four works by the artist Paolo di DONO, known as Paolo UCCELLO (Florence, 1397 - 1475).

The first two of these works are to be found in National Gallery - London.

The Battle of San Romano - probably about 1438-40.

&

Saint George and the Dragon about 1470.

The third of these works are to be found in the Louvre - Paris.

The Battle of San Romano - circa 1435-40.

The last of these works to be found in the Ashmolean Museum - Oxford.

The hunt in the forest - Circa 1470.

What might immediately strikes any viewer of these paintings is the way that horses are shown in these works.

Almost all of them are depicted with their two front legs in the air. This is not how horses behave. Though it was only with the development of photography in the 19th century that this was fully understood.

In many respects they look as though they are horses upon a fairground carousel.

There is also a lot of gold and highly decorative costumes which are worn by the characters in these paintings.

The two battle paintings show no blood or mud, although there are many broken lances which litter the ground in the Battle of San Romano painting.

All of these works show a profusion of lances, or spears.

They were painted to celebrate victories in battle, and to show the power & glory of a ruling elite.

They were not intended to show the realities of war.

In contrast the dragon which St George is slaying shows just blood slowly dribbling from its mouth. This is a blood which is almost the colour of wine. There are no gaping wounds to be seen, while the maid St George is rescuing just stands placidly to one side.

This dragon has always reminded me of a short winged aircraft which is about to take off. The roundlet marking upon its wings being very similar to what you might find upon many a military aircraft.

The Hunt in the Forest is a much more decorative work. It shows hunters on horseback, people on foot, and dogs in a chase. All of them are following a group of deer.

This in turn gives no idea of just how barbaric this so called blood sport can be.

All of these paintings are a reflections of the kind of society in which they were created.

Yet these are also important works in terms of the development of western art, and that should not be overlooked while we view them.

They are also important works in terms of just how our visual knowledge has developed over the years.

Martyn Lowe

**Information for Social Change Number 31  
Summer 2011**

**Public Libraries & Social Justice**

**John Pateman**

Libraries must be relevant to the needs of local communities which are becoming more diverse and multicultural. In this paper I will build on ground breaking research in the UK - *Open to All? The Public Library & Social Exclusion* (Muddiman et al, 2000) - and cutting edge good practice in Canada via the Working Together Project (2004-2008). I will outline the practical steps which are required to develop needs-based and community-led library services.

My overall theme is *Public Libraries & Social Justice* (Pateman & Vincent, 2010) and I will explore some of the challenges and barriers to creating socially inclusive libraries and how these can be overcome. I will provide a blue print and a road map for producing strategies, structures, systems and cultures which enable local communities to be fully involved and engaged in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of their library services.

Social Justice

In broad terms, Social Justice is about every one of us having the chances and opportunities to make the most of our lives and use our talents to the full. For libraries, it must involve:

- Embracing equality, diversity and multiculturalism
- Focusing on a needs-based service and targeting resources towards those who need them most
- Knowing and understanding the components of the local community
- Having an active, political role in empathising with, fighting in solidarity with and supporting the local community
- Fully engaging the community, moving as far as possible towards co-production of service provision.

The Spirit Level

In order to provide some context and background to this paper I read *The Spirit Level: why equality is better for everyone* (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). This ground breaking book, based on years of research, provides hard evidence to show:

- How almost everything – from life expectancy to mental illness, violence to illiteracy – is affected not by how wealthy a society is, but how equal it is
- That societies with a bigger gap between rich and poor are bad for everyone in them – including the well off

Denmark and the UK were among the 50 richest countries in the world used as case studies in this book. But the two countries are very different. Denmark has the world's highest level of [income equality](#) and has frequently ranked as the happiest and least corrupt country in the world.

The UK has one of the highest levels of income inequality. Despite being the sixth-largest economy in the world and the third-largest in Europe after Germany and France, 13.5 million people, or 22% of the population, live below the poverty line (defined as being 60% of the median household income). This is a higher level of [relative poverty](#) than all but four other EU members. Four million children, 31% of the total, live in households below the poverty line. Happiness levels for children in the UK are among the lowest in the developed world.

### Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, which has many different definitions. For the purposes of this paper I define multiculturalism as the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple [cultures](#), applied to the [demographic make-up](#) of a specific community, location or nation.

Multicultural policies were adopted by British governments from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, in particular by the [Labour government](#) of [Tony Blair](#) from 1997. When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came to power in May 2010 there was a move away from these policies due to evidence of incipient segregation and anxieties over "home-grown" [terrorism](#). On 5 February 2011 Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader [David Cameron](#) said in a speech that "state multiculturalism has failed".

The UK has a history of small-scale non-white immigration, with [Liverpool](#) having the oldest Black population in the country dating back to at least the 1730s, and the oldest [Chinese](#) community in Europe, dating to the arrival of Chinese seamen in the 19th century. In 1950 there were probably less than 20,000 non-white residents in Britain, almost all born overseas.

Since 1945 substantial immigration from Africa, the [Caribbean](#) and South Asia has been a legacy of ties forged by the [British Empire](#). Migration from new EU member states in [Central](#) and Eastern Europe since 2004 has resulted in growth in these population groups.

92.1% of the population identify themselves as White, leaving 7.9% of the UK population identifying themselves as mixed race or of an [ethnic minority](#). Ethnic diversity varies significantly across the UK. 30.4% of London's population and



37.4% of [Leicester](#)'s are estimated to be non-white, whereas less than 5% of the populations of [North East England](#), [Wales](#) and the [South West](#) were from ethnic minorities.

<a href="#">Ethnic group</a>	<b>Population</b>	<b>% of total</b>
<a href="#">White British</a>	50,366,497	85.67%
<a href="#">White (other)</a>	3,096,169	5.27%
<a href="#">Indian</a>	1,053,411	1.8%
<a href="#">Pakistani</a>	977,285	1.6%
<a href="#">White Irish</a>	691,232	1.2%
<a href="#">Mixed race</a>	677,117	1.2%
<a href="#">Black Caribbean</a>	565,876	1.0%
<a href="#">Black African</a>	485,277	0.8%
<a href="#">Bangladeshi</a>	283,063	0.5%
<a href="#">Other Asian (non-Chinese)</a>	247,644	0.4%
<a href="#">Chinese</a>	247,403	0.4%
<a href="#">Other</a>	230,615	0.4%
<a href="#">Black (others)</a>	97,585	0.2%

When we look at library use by different ethnic groups, we find that this varies from 45% to nearly 60%:

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage of library users</b>
White	44.9
Mixed	58.9
Asian	57.4
Black	55.8
Other	53.3

For example, 57.4% of the Asian community use public libraries compared to just 44.9% of the White community. Use of libraries by the Black community (55.8%) is also higher than the White Community. One of the main reasons for this is social class.

### Culture = Class

Culture encompasses more than ethnicity. Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group. This definition can be applied to an ethnic group or a social group. In the UK there is a rigid and enduring social class system which makes social mobility difficult. This is another by product of an unequal society. The balance of people who identify themselves as working or middle class has changed very little over the past 50 years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Working class</b>	<b>Middle class</b>	<b>Classless</b>
1964	65%	30%	5%
2005	57%	37%	6%

Variance	-8%	+7%	+1%
----------	-----	-----	-----

Social class is difficult to define as it encompasses many aspects including income, occupation, lifestyle and values. Many aspirational working class people define themselves as middle class and so the true balance is probably somewhere between 60-80% working class and 20-40% middle class.

When we look at library use by different social groups, as defined by occupation, we find that there are proportionately more middle class library users than among the working class group. On average, libraries are used by 35% of working class people and 53% of middle class people. Given that nearly 60-80% of the British population is working class, the fact that only around a third of this group are library users explains why a relatively low number of White people are library users:

<b>Socio-economic Group</b>	<b>Percentage of library users</b>
Routine occupations	33.6
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	37.1
Lower managerial & professional occupations	54.1
Higher managerial & professional occupations	52.5

So, the challenge to create a multicultural library service in the UK is as much about social class as it is about ethnicity. However, the strategies and techniques for encouraging higher levels of library use can be applied equally to ethnic and social groups.

The scale of the challenge can be seen in this model of the existing exclusive paradigm where only 12.8% of the UK population are active library users. These are people who own a library ticket and use the library on a regular basis. These are quite literally the centre of attention. They are the focus of most of the library service's resources, services and capacity. They use the library most but often need it the least.

A further 26.6% of the population are passive or lapsed users. These are people who own a library card but have not used the library in the past 12 months. They have some needs and could be attracted back into the library via marketing and promotion campaigns.

The majority of the population (60.6%) are non users. These are people who have never owned a library card. These are people who need the library the most but use it the least. They include large sections of the White working class and some sections of ethnic minority communities.

If this situation is to be reversed then an inclusive paradigm is required where the focus is on getting non users into the library. In this model the library service's resources, services and capacity are focused on the outer circle. The

direction of travel is towards the centre, with any spare resources being spent on passive and then active users. This is what I call a needs-based library service.

### Open to All

The conceptual framework for a needs-based library service in the UK was first developed in *Open to All? The Public Library & Social Exclusion* (Muddiman et al, 2000). I was a member of the team that produced *Open to All?*, an 18 month research project which examined the context of social exclusion and the nature of the problems facing public libraries and other public institutions. The record of the public library in tackling disadvantage was critically assessed and the weaknesses of a predominantly "voluntary" approach to exclusion based on access were highlighted. A survey of contemporary public library services and eight case studies of public library authorities suggested that although public libraries were modernising their services, this modernisation was unlikely to refocus the public library on excluded communities and social groups. The project concluded that to do this, and to become more than superficially "open to all", the public library needed to transform itself into a far more proactive, educative and interventionist public institution, with a concern for social justice at its core.

The suggested elements of this transformation were:

- the mainstreaming of provision for socially excluded groups and communities and the establishment of standards of service and their monitoring;
- the adoption of resourcing strategies which prioritise the needs of excluded people and communities;
- a recasting of the role of library staff to encompass a more socially responsive and educative approach;
- staffing policies and practices which address exclusion, discrimination and prejudice;
- targeting of excluded social groups and communities;
- the development of community-based approaches to library provision, which incorporate consultation with and partnership with local communities;
- ICT and networking developments which actively focus on the needs of excluded people;
- a recasting of the image and identity of the public library to link it more closely with the cultures of excluded communities and social groups.

This report was launched in August 2000 by Mo Mowlam, Minister for the Cabinet Office. There is much evidence to show the significant impact which this report has had on library services in the UK and abroad over the past 11 years.

### The Network

*Open to All?* was not the first report to recommend changes to the UK public library system. However, most of these previous reports had ended up gathering dust on the shelves of policy makers while public libraries continued to operate in much the same way as when they were first established in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We were determined that *Open to All?* would not suffer the same fate and to keep our ideas alive we created The Network which supports libraries, museums, archives, galleries and other cultural and heritage

organisations (as well as individuals) who are working to tackle social exclusion. Most of the UK public library authorities have joined the Network as well as a number of national museums and galleries. This means that the ideas contained in *Open to All?* are continuing to reach a very wide audience. Visit our website at [www.seapn.org.uk](http://www.seapn.org.uk) to find out more – and join us!

### Working Together

*Open to All?* also had an impact on library services beyond the UK, particularly in Canada where the Working Together Project (2004-2008) was initiated to develop methods for libraries to work with low-income communities through a community development approach. Working Together was piloted in four Canadian public library services – Vancouver, Halifax, Toronto, and Regina – with the aim of putting the ideas and recommendations of *Open to All?* into action.

Working Together had two main objectives:

- Through establishing ongoing relationships with socially excluded people, work collaboratively with socially excluded communities to articulate and respond to their library service wants and needs.
- Identify and examine systemic barriers to library use for socially excluded people and propose policy and procedural change to address these barriers, including the development of an inclusive service planning model.

Community Development Librarian posts were created and placed in the community to find out what was actually happening and how public libraries were perceived.

This revealed that holistic and systemic changes were required to every aspect of the library service including strategies, structures, systems and organisational culture which are mutually supportive and focused on social justice. The first stage in the transformation process must be the development of a robust strategy and a clear vision which all stakeholders can sign up to. Strategy development should be an inclusive process and actively involve staff, councillors, board members, partners, suppliers and all sections of the local community.

This will require creative and non-traditional approaches to community engagement to make sure that everyone is involved in the process. This engagement should be towards the empowerment – leadership end of the community involvement continuum:

<b>PASSIVE</b>	<b>REACTIVE</b>	<b>PARTICIPATIVE</b>	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>
Local residents and organizations are informed of issues by library service.	Local residents and organizations provide input into the priorities and resource use of library service.	Local residents and organizations influence the priorities and resources of library service.	Local residents and organizations work in shared planning and action with library service.	Local residents and organizations initiate and lead on issues with support from library service.

The next stage in the process of developing a needs-based library service is to remodel the staffing and service structures to enable them to deliver the new strategy. This will require a review of existing structures to ensure that services are in the right place, open at the right time and delivering the right range of services to meet local community needs.

Staff roles and skills will also need to be reviewed to ensure that you have *The right 'man' for the job?* (Wilson & Birdi, 2008). This refers to some important research carried out at the University of Sheffield into the role of empathy in community librarianship. The following set of key staff skills were identified as being critical to a socially inclusive library service: Communication, listening & negotiation skills; Influencing relationships; Reflective practice; Improved confidence and assertiveness; Dealing with conflict.

The third stage in developing a needs-based library service is to assess all existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that they are consistent with the strategy, service and staffing structures.

For example, in the traditional library service planning model, all stages of the process are initiated and led by library staff with little or no input from the local community:

<b>Community Assessment</b>	<b>Needs Identification</b>	<b>Service Planning</b>	<b>Delivery</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Staff review  Demographic data  Library use statistics  Comment Cards  Community survey results	Staff identify service gaps or under-served communities	Staff review literature  Staff consult with other staff and service providers  Staff develop service response	Staff deliver service:  Develop the collection,  Hold the programme,  Design facilities.	Staff review various inputs:  Feedback forms  Programme attendance  Collection use  Library card enrolment

This should be replaced with a Community-Led service planning model where the staff and the local community work together to design, plan, deliver and evaluate library services:

<b>Community Assessment</b>	<b>Needs Identification</b>	<b>Service Planning</b>	<b>Delivery</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Staff review all of the traditional measures and:  Staff spend time in community developing relationships with local people  Staff hear from community about what is important to them.	Staff discuss with community and hear from them what their priorities are	Service ideas are the community's ideas.  Community is engaged in the planning of the service.  Staff act as partners and facilitators rather than creators and experts.	Community and staff work together to deliver the service:  Community involved in selecting materials  Community active in hosting the programme  Community work with the library to develop policy recommendations .	Community and staff discuss:  How did the process work?  Did the service/policy, etc. actually address the need?  What could have been done differently?

The final and most important stage in developing a needs-based library service is to create an organisational culture which can support and deliver the strategy, service and staffing structures, and systems. Organisational culture has been defined as 'the way we do things around here' and it includes attitudes, behaviours and values, which are difficult to change.

The Working Together project generated an organisational culture shift away from Outreach and towards a Community Development model which is able to identify, prioritise and meet community needs:

<b>OUTREACH</b>	<b>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</b>
Goes out into the community to deliver a service or programme (story time at school, display at community centre).	Begins with relationship building.
Tells audience what the library has to offer, but rarely seeks opinions of participants and what they might like the library to offer.	Identifies and assists in articulating individual or community needs.
	Identifies and provides services that meet those needs  Investigates ways to work collaboratively to meet needs.  Identifies gaps in services and policy.

The Working Together Project has produced two extremely useful guides on how to develop community-led library services:

- *Community Led Libraries Toolkit: starting us all down the path toward developing inclusive public libraries* (Working Together, 2008)
- *Community-Led Service Philosophy Toolkit* (Edmonton Public Library, 2010)

Further information can also be found on the Information for Social Change website. **Information for Social Change** is an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers. It is committed to promoting alternatives to the dominant paradigms of library and information work and publishes its own journal, *Information for Social Change* (freely available online at [www.libr.org](http://www.libr.org)).

In conclusion, the needs of multicultural communities can best be met by developing socially inclusive, needs based and community led library services. The conceptual framework developed by *Open to All?* and implemented by Working Together demonstrate that public libraries can be key agencies for enabling social change and social justice.

Vohn Pateman

### References

Wilson, K & Birdi, B (2008) *The right 'man' for the job? The role of empathy in community librarianship*, University of Sheffield

Muddiman, D et al (2000) *Open to All? The Public Library & Social Exclusion*, Resource: The Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives

Pateman, J & Vincent, J (2010) *Public Libraries & Social Justice*, Ashgate

Wilkinson, R & Pickett, K (2010) *The Spirit Level: why equality is better for everyone*, Penguin

Working Together Project (2008) *Community Led Libraries Toolkit: starting us all down the path toward developing inclusive public libraries*,

Working Together Project (2010) *Community-Led Service Philosophy Toolkit*

### Websites

Information for Social Change ( [www.libr.org/isc](http://www.libr.org/isc))

The Network ([www.seapn.org.uk](http://www.seapn.org.uk))

Working Together Project ([www.librariesincommunities.ca](http://www.librariesincommunities.ca))



**Information for Social Change Number 31**  
**Summer 2011**

**Public Libraries & The Spirit Level**

**John Pateman**

The Spirit Level

In August 2011 I attended the Nordic Libraries conference in Copenhagen. I knew that Scandinavian countries were among the most equal in the world, but I did not realise how significant this was until I read *The Spirit Level: why equality is better for everyone* by Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett (Penguin, 2010). This ground breaking book, based on years of research, provides hard evidence to show:

How almost everything – from life expectancy to mental illness, violence to illiteracy – is affected not by how wealthy a society is, but how equal it is. That societies with a bigger gap between rich and poor are bad for everyone in them – including the well off

Wilkinson & Pickett obtained a list of the 50 richest countries in the world from the World Bank. This report was published in 2004 and is based on data from 2002. Countries with populations below 3 million (to avoid tax havens like the Cayman Islands and Monaco) and countries without comparable data on income inequality (such as Iceland) were excluded. That left 23 rich countries which were ranked in order of income inequality (measured by how much richer the richest 20% are than the poorest 20% in each country) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Income Equality

<b>Income gap (low to high)</b>		<b>Income gap (low to high)</b>	
Japan	1	Switzerland	13
Finland	2	Ireland	14
Norway	3	Greece	15
Sweden	4	Italy	16
Denmark	5	Israel	17
Belgium	6	New Zealand	18
Austria	7	Australia	19
Germany	8	UK	20
Netherlands	9	Portugal	21
Spain	10	USA	22
France	11	Singapore	23
Canada	12		

Wilkinson & Pickett found a startling correlation between income equality and a whole range of issues including happiness, physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teenage births and child well being.

For example, in more equal societies: people live longer, a smaller proportion of children die in infancy and self-rated health is better; children do better at school and there is more social mobility; communities are more cohesive and people trust each other more.

In rich countries, a **smaller gap between rich and poor** means a happier, healthier, and more successful population. The USA, the UK, Portugal, and New Zealand do much worse than Japan, Sweden or Norway.

Meanwhile, more economic growth will NOT lead to a happier, healthier, or more successful population. In fact, there is no relation between income per head and social well-being in rich countries.

If the UK were more equal, we'd be better off as a population. For example, the evidence suggests that if we halved inequality here:

- Murder rates could halve
- Mental illness could reduce by two thirds
- Obesity could halve
- Imprisonment could reduce by 80%
- Teen births could reduce by 80%
- Levels of trust could increase by 85%

It's not just poor people who do better. The evidence suggests people all the way up would benefit, although it's true that the poorest would gain the most.

These findings hold true, whether you look across developed nations, or across the 50 states of the USA. But do they hold true when it comes to public libraries?

### Public Libraries

David Fuegi & Martin Jennings produced a report on *International library statistics: trends and commentary based on the LIBECON data*. This report was published in 2004 and is based on data from 2001. The LIBECON statistics are consistent with ISO2789 (International Library Statistics) and ISO11620 (Performance Indicators).

ISO 2789 specifies rules for the library and information services community on the collection and reporting of statistics: for the purposes of international reporting; to ensure conformity between countries for those statistical measures that are frequently used by library managers but do not qualify for international reporting; to encourage good practice in the use of statistics for the management of library and information services, and to specify data provision required by ISO 11620.

ISO 11620 specifies the requirements of a performance indicator for libraries and establishes a set of performance indicators to be used by libraries of all types. It also provides guidance on how to implement performance indicators in libraries where such performance indicators are not already in use. ISO 11620 is applicable to all types of libraries in all countries.

There are 32 countries in the LIBECON database of internationally comparable public library statistics. 21 of these countries also appear in the Spirit Level list of 23 states (the two exceptions are Israel and Singapore).

Table 2: Library Loans, Members and Visits

Table 2 indicates library loans per head of population, the % of population who are library members and library visits per head of population for each of these 21 countries:

Country	Loans	Members	Visits	Country	Loans	Members	Visits
Australia		21	4.21	Japan	4.3	30	6.48
Austria	1.8	10	0.65	Netherlands	12.1	27	5.13
Belgium	7.1	24	5.25	New Zealand		21	4.21
Canada	10.6	21	4.09	Norway	5.2	29	4.98
Denmark	13.4	35	6.14	Portugal	0.3	54	5.27
Finland	19.8	46	12.39	Spain	0.7	19	5.16
France	5.2	20	5.21	Sweden	9.1	27	5.34
Germany	3.7	10	3.64	Switzerland	0.9	30	4.67
Greece	0.2	27	0.23	UK	6.9	56	5.28
Ireland	3.2	24	5.36	USA	6.4	21	4.09
Italy	4.1	28	5.27				

There is no real international consensus on what makes the best library service but if we have to make a judgement based on the internationally comparable and available statistical indicators then those in the above table are very mainstream, consistent with ISO11620 and in no way perverse or eccentric.

Table 3: Library Loans

Table 3 ranks each country in terms of library loans per head of population, from high to low:

Country	Loans/ pop	Rank	Country	Loans/ pop	Rank
Finland	19.8	1	Japan	4.3	11
Denmark	13.4	2	Italy	4.1	12
Netherlands	12.1	3	Germany	3.7	13
Canada	10.6	4	Ireland	3.2	14
Sweden	9.1	5	Austria	1.8	15
Belgium	7.1	6	Switzerland	0.9	16
UK	6.9	7	Spain	0.7	17
USA	6.4	8	Portugal	0.3	18
Norway	5.2	= 9	Greece	0.2	19
France	5.2	= 9			

Library loans (the number of books and other items borrowed from public libraries) was for many years the key performance indicator for public libraries. The limitations of this indicator are that it only measures one aspect of library performance (predominantly book loans).

#### Table 4: Library Membership

Table 4 ranks each country in terms of % of the population who are library members, from high to low:

Country	% members	Rank	Country	% members	Rank
UK	56	1	Belgium	24	=12
Portugal	54	2	Ireland	24	=12
Finland	46	3	Canada	21	=14
Denmark	35	4	New Zealand	21	=14
Japan	30	=5	USA	21	=14
Switzerland	30	=5	Australia	21	=14
Norway	29	7	France	20	18
Italy	28	8	Spain	19	19
Sweden	27	=9	Germany	10	=20
Netherlands	27	=9	Austria	10	=20
Greece	27	=9			

Library membership counts the number of people who register to join the library service, as a proportion of the total population. The limitations of this measure are that not all library members are active library users.

Table 5: Library Visits

Table 5 ranks each country in terms of library visits per head of population, from high to low:

Country	Visits/pop	Rank	Country	Visits/pop	Rank
Finland	12.39	1	Netherlands	5.13	12
Japan	6.48	2	Norway	4.98	13
Denmark	6.14	3	Switzerland	4.67	14
Sweden	5.34	4	Australia	4.21	=15
Ireland	5.36	5	New Zealand	4.21	=15
UK	5.28	6	Canada	4.09	=17
Italy	5.27	=7	USA	4.09	=17
Portugal	5.27	=7	Germany	3.64	19
Belgium	5.25	9	Austria	0.65	20
France	5.21	10	Greece	0.23	21
Spain	5.16	11			

Library visits (the number of people who visit a library) is probably the most accurate measure of library use. It counts everyone who uses the library for whatever reason and is more comprehensive than library loans and library membership.

Table 6: Public Libraries and the Spirit Level

Table 6 ranks countries by income gap (low to high), loans per head of population (high to low), % of the population who are library members (high to low) and visits per head of population (high to low):

Income gap (low to high)		Loans/pop (high to low)		% memb. (high to low)		Visits/pop (high to low)	
Japan	1	Finland	1	UK	1	Finland	1
Finland	2	Denmark	2	Portugal	2	Japan	2
Norway	3	Netherlands	3	Finland	3	Denmark	3
Sweden	4	Canada	4	Denmark	4	Sweden	4
Denmark	5	Sweden	5	Japan	=5	Ireland	5
Belgium	6	Belgium	6	Switzerland	=5	UK	6
Austria	7	UK	7	Norway	7	Italy	=7
Germany	8	USA	8	Italy	8	Portugal	=7
Netherlands	9	Norway	=9	Sweden	=9	Belgium	9
Spain	10	France	=9	Netherlands	=9	France	10

France	1 1	Japan	11	Greece	=9	Spain	11
Canada	1 2	Italy	12	Belgium	=1 2	Netherlands	12
Switzerland	1 3	Germany	13	Ireland	=1 2	Norway	13
Ireland	1 4	Ireland	14	Canada	=1 4	Switzerland	14
Greece	1 5	Austria	15	New Zealand	=1 4	Australia	=15
Italy	1 6	Switzerland	16	USA	=1 4	New Zealand	=15
New Zealand	1 7	Spain	17	Australia	=1 4	Canada	=17
Australia	1 8	Portugal	18	France	18	USA	=17
UK	1 9	Greece	19	Spain	19	Germany	19
Portugal	2 0			Germany	=2 0	Austria	20
USA	2 1			Austria	=2 0	Greece	21

There is a close correlation between countries with relatively small income gaps and those with high levels of book loans, library membership and library visits:

- Finland, Denmark and Sweden have high levels of book loans per head of population.
- Finland, Denmark and Japan have high levels of book loans per head of population.
- Finland, Japan, Denmark, and Sweden have high levels of library visits per head of population.

There is also a correlation between countries with relatively large income gaps and those with low levels of book loans, library membership and library visits:

- The USA, Australia and New Zealand rank low in terms of library membership and visits

There are a number of what Wilkinson & Pickett call 'outliers', where there is little or no correlation between relative income gap and library performance:

- Portugal has a relatively large income gap but ranks high in terms of library membership and visits
- The UK has a relatively large income gap but ranks high in terms of library membership, visits and book loans

Fuegi & Jennings noted that 'The UK does not appear to have slipped as far as many British librarians believe, despite startling reductions in loans over a number of years and severe financial restrictions.'

This startling reduction in loans has continued in recent years. Book loans have fallen from 405.9 million in 2001 to 263.2 million in 2010, a decrease of 35%.

The % of the UK population who are library members has fallen from 56% in 2001 to 39.4% in 2010. Of this 39.4% only 12.6% are active users (people who have used their library card in the last 12 months) and 26.6% are passive or lapsed users (people who have not used their library card in the last 12 months). 60.6% of the population are not library members.

Library visits increased slightly from 270.7 million in 2001 to 271.5 million in 2010. However, visits are down by 6.6% from their high of 290.9 million visits in 2005.

This fall in library performance is in line with the UK's increasing level of income inequality. Despite being the sixth-largest economy in the world and the third-largest in Europe after Germany and France, 13.5 million people, or 22% of the population, live below the poverty line (defined as being 60% of the median household income). This is a higher level of [relative poverty](#) than all but four other EU members. Four million children, 31% of the total, live in households below the poverty line. Happiness levels for children in the UK are among the lowest in the developed world.

### Conclusion

*The Spirit Level* makes a clear link between income inequality and a wide range of issues including the use of public libraries. The Nordic countries have a small income gap and high levels of library use. The UK has become one of the most unequal countries in the world and this has been reflected in falling levels of library use. The deep cuts in public expenditure are likely to accelerate this decline. Wilkinson & Pickett have suggested that 'Political will is a precondition for success for the adoption of any effective policies to reduce inequality - political will among public and politicians alike. That will only be forthcoming when people recognise how important greater equality is to the quality of social relations - and so to the real quality of life - for the vast majority of the population.'

Vohn Pateman

### References

Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett (2010) *The Spirit Level: why equality is better for everyone*

David Fuegi & Martin Jennings (2004) *International library statistics: trends and commentary based on the LIBECON data.*

Museums, Libraries & Archives (2010) *Trends From CIPFA Public Library Service*